

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 7071

EXDIS

NKKO. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PEPR, JO, IS, EG
SUBJECT: GAZA STRIP POLITICAL DYNAMICS

REF: STATE 136042 (NOTAL)

1. THE FOLLOWING REPRESENTS GENERAL EMBASSY REACTION TO QUESTIONS POSED IN REFTEL. AS DEPARTMENT REALIZES, QUESTIONS OF WHETHER AUTONOMY GRANTED UNILATERALLY BY ISRAELIS OR AS A RESULT OF REGIONAL AGREEMENT PLAYS MAJOR ROLE IN ITS ACCEPTABILITY. ISRAELIS SOONER OF LATER WILL BE ABLE TO REPLACE THEIR OWN PEOPLE, WHO NOW NUMBER ABOUT 130, WITH GAZANS TO FULLY RUN TECHNICAL SERVICES IN THE STRIP. HOWEVER, WE DOUBT WHETHER THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO CONVINCE ANY GAZANS OF STATURE TO HOLD A POLITICAL POSITION IN AN OVERALL WEST BANK AND/OR GAZA BODY (SUCH AS THE ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL PROPOSED IN THE BEGIN PLAN) UNLESS THIS IS ACCEPTABLE TO AT LEAST EGYPT, JORDAN AND SAUDI ARABIA.

2. AS WE SEE THE GAZA STRIP TODAY, THE CURRENT SOURCES OF INDIGENOUS POLITICAL LEADERSHIP ARE THE TRADITIONAL ELITE REPRESENTING THE MAJOR CLANS (SUCH AS THE SHAWWAS);

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THE REFUGEE COMMUNITY WITH A LEADERSHIP CENTERED IN THE UNRWA LOCAL STAFF, AND THE PLO UNDERGROUND (NOW MOSTLY IN-ACTIVE).

3. UNLIKE THE WEST BANK, WHERE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS HAVE LED TO SHIFTS AWAY FROM TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY, THE GAZA STRIP HAS NOT HAD A LOCAL BALLOT SINCE 1946. THE MAYORS

OF THE FOUR MUNICIPALITIES AND SEVEN VILLAGES WITH LOCAL COUNCILS ARE ALL APPOINTED AND SERVE AT THE PLEASURE OF THE ISRAELI MILITARY GOVERNOR. THE ISRAELIS HAVE TENDED TO WORK WITH THE TRADITIONAL LEADERS AND HAVE ESTABLISHED GOOD PRAGMATIC WORKING RELATIONS WITH THEM. THIS SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP HAS BEEN USEFUL TO BOTH. THE TRADITIONAL ELITE BENEFIT BY HAVING ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO BESTOW AS PATRON-AGE AND BY PARTIALLY CONTROLLING THE GAZA CIVIL ADMINISTRATION. THE ISRAELIS BENEFIT BY BEING ABLE TO LIMIT THEIR DAY-TO-DAY INVOLVEMENT IN THE GOVERNING OF THE STRIP TO THE EXTENT THEY DESIRE.

4. GROUPS SUCH AS THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS ALSO PLAY A POLITICAL ROLE IN GAZA. THE GAZAN BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION, HEADED BY THE MAYOR AND RUN BY HIS BROTHER, IS THE UNOFFICIAL JORDANIAN EMBASSY IN GAZA. IT HAS BEEN ENTRUSTED, DUE TO THE SHAWWAS' CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HASHEMITES, WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PROVIDING TRAVEL DOCUMENTS TO JORDAN. THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IS ALSO HEADED BY A SHAWWA AND REPRESENTS THE ECONOMIC INTERESTS OF THE MAJOR CLANS. THESE ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENT THE WEALTHY TRADITIONAL ELITE AND ARE UNLIKELY TO DEVELOP A ROLE MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE ONE THEY NOW PLAY.

5. AN AUTONOMOUS SOURCE OF POWER IN GAZA, SEPARATE FROM
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THE LOCAL CLANS AND THE ISRAELIS, IS GENERATED BY THE UNRWA ESTABLISHMENT. UNRWA'S MULTIMILLION DOLLAR OPERATION PROVIDES ITS LOCAL STAFF WITH AN INFLUENTIAL TOOL FOR GAINING INFLUENCE WITHIN THE REFUGEE COMMUNITY. UNRWA'S EXTENSIVE ADMINISTRATION CAN ALSO BE UTILIZED AS AN EFFECTIVE POLITICAL TRANSMISSION BELT. UNRWA HAS MORE SCHOOLS AND TEACHES MORE STUDENTS IN GAZA THAN THE GOVERNMENT. THERE ARE NEARLY 2,000 UNRWA TEACHERS IN THE STRIP, AS WELL AS A LARGE NUMBER OF UNRWA EMPLOYEES WORKING IN THE MEDICAL AND ADMINISTRATION FIELDS. THESE UNRWA STAFFERS WOULD PROBABLY TRY TO TRANSLATE THEIR POSITION INTO POLITICAL POWER IF THE STRIP WERE GIVEN MORE AUTONOMY.

6. IT IS DIFFICULT TO SAY MUCH ABOUT PLO SYMPATHIZERS IN GAZA TODAY. THE UNDERGROUND ORGANIZATION WAS BROKEN BY THE ISRAELIS IN 1971/72 AND HAS NEVER RECOVERED, ALTHOUGH TERRORIST CELLS ARE DISCOVERED NOW AND THEN. IN ANY CASE, UNDER WHATEVER SELF-RULE ULTIMATELY DEVELOPS, THE PLO'S ABILITY TO REESTABLISH ITS ORGANIZATION WOULD BE LIMITED BY THE MILITARY AND INTERNAL SECURITY PRESENCE THAT THE ISRAELIS WOULD INEVITABLY RETAIN IN GAZA.

7. IF MORE AUTONOMY WERE INTRODUCED, THIS COULD EVENTUALLY INCLUDE THE HOLDING OF ELECTIONS. THE CURRENT MAYOR OF GAZA, RASHAD SHAWWA, WOULD COME UNDER CHALLENGE, NOT SO MUCH FROM HIS FELLOW TRADITIONAL LEADERS BUT FROM YOUNGER AND MORE NATIONALISTIC GAZA ELEMENTS. MANY QUESTIONS SURROUND THE ROLE THE REFUGEES WOULD PLAY IN SUCH ELECTIONS. WOULD THE ELECTION LAWS, WHICHEVER ONES ARE FOUND TO APPLY, PROVIDE FOR ONE MAN-ONE VOTE OR WOULD THERE BE A LIMITED SUFFRAGE AS ON THE WEST BANK? IN ADDITION, THERE IS THE QUESTION OF HOW THESE PEOPLE WOULD VIEW THEIR ROLE IN GAZAN ELECTIONS. ALTHOUGH THEY ARE PHYSICALLY LOCATED IN GAZA, THEY SEEM THEMSELVES AS REFUGEES FROM SOMEWHERE ELSE IN PALESTINE WHO ULTIMATELY WILL RETURN HOME. TO EMPHASIZE THEIR REFUGEE STATUS, THEY COULD CHOOSE TO BOYCOTT LOCAL
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VAZA ELECTIONS. IF, HOWEVER, THEY VOTE, THEY HAVE THE NUMBERS TO OVERTHROW GAZA'S TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP. UNDER AN AUTONOMY REGIME THE ISRAELIS WOULD BE LIKELY TO SUPPORT THE TRADITIONAL LEADERS AGAINST MORE NATIONALISTIC PRO-PLO REFUGEE ELEMENTS AND FIND WAYS TO PROMOTE THE CAUSE OF THEIR CANDIDATES. GAZA MAYOR SHAWWA, THE LEADING FIGURE AMONG THE ORIGINAL GAZA RESIDENTS, WOULD PROBABLY MAINTAIN

HIS POSITION WITH NEW ELECTIONS. HOWEVER, HE IS 71 YEARS OLD AND OTHER MEMBERS OF HIS FAMILY ARE UNLIKELY TO SUCCEED IN STEPPING INTO HIS PARAMOUNT POSITION IN GAZAN SOCIETY. AS A RESULT, EVEN WITHOUT THE INTRODUCTION OF AUTONOMY OR NEW ELECTIONS, THERE ARE LIKELY TO BE SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN THE INDIGENOUS GAZA LEADERSHIP WHEN SHAWWA DIES.

8. POLITICAL ATTITUDES IN THE GAZA STRIP ARE, OF COURSE, INFLUENCED BY THE CURRENTS RUNNING IN THE ARAB WORLD AT ANY PARTICULAR TIME. THE SAME CLEAVAGES AND IDEOLOGICAL AFFINITIES WHICH OCCUR ELSEWHERE CAN BE FOUND IN GAZA. MANY OF THE TRADITIONAL LEADERS, ESPECIALLY THE SHAWWAS, HAVE A PREFERENCE FOR KING HUSSEIN. ALTHOUGH EDUCATIONAL AND SOME TRADE TIES REMAIN, GAZANS REMEMBER THE HARSHNESS OF
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THE EGYPTIAN OCCUPATION AND DO NOT RELISH THE THOUGHT OF THEIR RETURN. ALTHOUGH OCCASIONALLY PAYING LIP SERVICE TO THE PLO, DEPENDING UPON HOW THE WIND IS BLOWING, THEY HAVE NO DESIRE TO SHARE THEIR TURF WITH IT. THE REFUGEES, ON THE OTHER HAND, VIEW THE PLO AS THEIR SPOKESMAN. HOWEVER, THEY ARE PROBABLY ADVERSE TO A RETURN TO THE PERIOD OF TERRORISM SUCH AS EXISTED IN THE LATE 60'S AND EARLY 70'S. A GROWING MINORITY HAVE PUT DOWN ECONOMIC ROOTS AND WOULD OPPOSE POLITICAL INSTABILITY. ANOTHER INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT FACTOR IS THE CONSERVATIVE INFLUENCE ON THE GULF STATES. BECAUSE OF GAZA'S URGENT NEED FOR DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE.

9. THE WILLINGNESS OF GAZA LEADERS TO ASSUME RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER A TRANSITION PERIOD WILL DEPEND MOST IMPORTANTLY UPON ITS ACCEPTABILITY TO THE ARAB WORLD. AN AGREEMENT APPROVED BY EGYPT, JORDAN AND SAUDI ARABIA WOULD DRAW THE SUPPORT OF MAJOR ELEMENTS OF THE TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP. THE TERMS OF ANY SUCH AGREEMENT, AS LONG AS THEY INCLUDE MAJOR ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM THE STRIP, WOULD PROBABLY BE A SECONDARY ISSUE.

10. GAZA DOES NOT HAVE MUCH OF AN IMPACT ON WEST BANK POLITICAL LIFE. MAYOR SHAWWA AND OTHER TRADITIONAL LEADERS MAINTAIN LINKS WITH WEST BANK MAYORS BUT DO NOT PARTICULARLY INFLUENCE THEM. SHAWWA APPEARS TO BE PARTICULARLY CLOSE TO MAYOR FREIJ OF BETHLEHEM AND PRO-JORDANIANS LIKE ANWAR AL-KHATIB. WEST BANKERS AGREE WITH GAZANS THAT BOTH ARE PALESTINAINS WITH AN INTEREST IN ENDING THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION. HOWEVER, NEITHER HAS REALLY DONE VERY MUCH THINKING ON WHAT IT WOULD MEAN TO HAVE A GAZA LINKED TO THE WEST BANK.

11. WE HAVE BEEN IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH CONGEN JERUSALEM ON

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THIS PROJECT AND ORALLY EXCHANGED IDEAS WITH THEM. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NOT SEEN THEIR THOUGHTS IN FINAL FORM, WE SHARE THEIR IMPRESSION THAT A UNILATERAL ISRAELI IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLITICAL ASPECTS OF THE SELF-RULE PLAN WOULD BE REJECTED BY WEST BANK LEADERS. WASHINGTON WILL UNDERSTAND THAT THE ABOVE REPRESENTS A SHORT FUSE RESPONSE. HAD WE HAD MORE TIME, WE WOULD HAVE SENT SOMEONE TO GAZA TO DISCUSS SPECIFICALLY JUST THESE ISSUES. UNFORTUNATELY, THE PRESS OF OTHER BUSINESS HERE THIS WEEK PREVENTED THAT. NONETHELESS, WE STAND BY THE GENERAL THEMES DEVELOPED IN THIS MESSAGE.
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